

Towards a Common Language: Sexuality & Gender Terms & Phrases

For quick reference, terms related to LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences. Please note: all terms may be time and context specific and have a more nuanced meaning.

Compiled by College of Wooster's Safe Zone with additions/edits by Hollins University from GLSEN, Dena Samuels, The Gender Book, PFLAG National, and www.TheSafeZoneProject.com

- **AFAB:** Acronym meaning *Assigned Female at Birth*. AFAB people may or may not identify as female some or all of the time.
- **Affirmed Gender:** An individual's true gender, as opposed to their gender assigned at birth. This term should replace terms like *new gender* or *chosen gender*, which imply that an individual's gender was chosen.
- **Agender** – person who is intentionally ungendered; some feel they have no gender identity while other feel that agender is itself an identity
- **Ally** – actively advocating for members of a community other than their own; one who confronts privilege and oppression in self and others
- **AMAB:** Acronym meaning *Assigned Male at Birth*. AMAB people may or may not identify as male some or all of the time (see *Gender*).
- **Androgyny** – presenting with gender expression mixed or neutral
- **Aromantic (aro)** – not experiencing romantic attraction
- **Asexual (ace)** – broadly, not experiencing sexual attraction and/or interest
- **Assigned Sex:** The sex that is assigned to an infant at birth based on the child's visible sex organs, including genitalia and other physical characteristics.
- **Assumed Gender:** The gender others assume an individual to be based on the sex they are assigned at birth, as well as apparent gender markers and expectations (e.g., physical attributes and characteristics).
- **Bigender** – a person who fluctuates between traditionally “woman” and “man” gender based behavior and identities, identifying with both genders (and sometimes a third)
- **Binary** – false divide of identities into two categories; female/male, straight/gay, black/white
- **Binding:** The process of tightly wrapping one's chest in order to minimize the appearance of having breasts, (using a binder)
- **Bisexual/biromantic** – potential to feel sexually and/or romantic/emotional attracted to and engage in relationships with people either of one's own gender or another gender though not necessarily at the same time or to the same extent
- **Biological Sex:** Refers to anatomical, physiological, genetic, or physical attributes that determine if a person is male, female, or intersex. These include primary and secondary sex characteristics, including genitalia, gonads, hormone levels, hormone receptors, chromosomes, and genes.
- **Biphobia** – fear, hatred, or aversion towards bisexuals; often from stereotypes or invisibility (or bierasure)
- **Cisgender:** Refers to an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.
- **Cisnormativity:** The assumption that cisgender identity is the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions and institutional privileges that further the marginalization of transgender people.
- **Cissexism** – promotion of transphobia and the belief that the cisgender experience is the normal and typical experience for people as well as a term that describes the marginalization of trans identities due to cultural or societal factors
- **Closeted:** Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Coming Out** – highly individualized process of disclosing one's identity to self or others, as usually applied to sexual orientation; not a ‘one-time’ event and does not apply to all identities or individuals
- **Crossdresser** – Anyone who wears clothes made for another gender without a full-time identity of that gender, for fun, pleasure, self-expression, or comfort.
- **Demisexual/demiromantic** – someone who does not experience sexual attraction unless they experience a strong emotional connection
- **Disclosure:** A word that some people use to describe the act or process of revealing one's transgender or gender-expansive identity to another person in a specific instance. Some find the term offensive, implying the need to disclose something shameful, and prefer to use the term *coming out*, whereas others find coming out offensive, and prefer to use *disclosure*.
- **Drag** – performance of one or multiple genders theatrically or for entertainment
- **Drag King or Drag Queen** – A performance artist who uses gender as a medium to make art, entertain, and sometimes educate
- **Feminine of Center/Masculine of Center** – a word that indicates a range of terms of gender identity and gender presentation for folks who present, understand themselves, relate to others in a more feminine/masculine way
- **Fluid** – changes in sexual orientation, whether over a lifetime, years, months or sometimes weeks or days at a time
- **FTM (F2M) / MTF (M2F)** – acronym for Female-to-Male/ Male-to-Female
- **FTX/F2X:** A genderqueer or gender expansive person who was

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- assigned female at birth.
- **Gay** – someone who is sexually, romantically, and emotionally attracted to the same sex and/or gender; often refers to men but not exclusively
- **Gender** – A set of cultural identities, expressions and roles – codified as feminine or masculine – that are assigned to people based upon the interpretation of their bodies, and more specifically, their sexual and reproductive anatomy. Since gender is a social construction, it is possible to reject or modify the gender one is assigned at birth, and to develop, live and express a gender that feels truer and just to oneself.
- **Gender Binary**: A socially constructed system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two categories, “male” and “female,” in which no other possibilities for gender are believed to exist. The gender binary is a restrictive and inaccurate way to view gender because it does not take into account the diversity of gender identities and gender expressions among all people. The gender binary is oppressive to anyone that does not conform to dominant societal gender norms.
- **Gender confirmation/affirmation surgery** – surgical procedures that change one’s body to better reflect a person’s gender identity. Not undertaken by all transgender people and not required for a trans person’s identity to be valid. Preferred to “sex reassignment surgery.”
- **Gender dysphoria** – a diagnostic term to support folks feeling distress around one’s gender or stress around the way their gender is perceived.
- **Gender Expansive**: An umbrella term sometimes used to describe people that expand notions of gender expression and identity beyond what is perceived as the expected gender norms for their society or context. Some gender-expansive individuals identify as a man or a woman, some identify as neither, and others identify as a mix of both. Gender-expansive people feel that they exist psychologically between genders, as on a spectrum, or beyond the notion of the man/woman binary paradigm, and sometimes prefer using gender-neutral pronouns (see *personal gender pronouns*). They may or may not be comfortable with their bodies as they are, regardless of how they express their gender.
- **Gender expression/presentation** – the way in which someone expresses their identity through clothing, behavior, posture, mannerisms, etc. The physical presentation of self as a gendered person through culturally identified symbols and markers (hair length/style, clothes, among others).
- **Genderfluid** – person whose gender identification or presentation shifts, either within or outside gender-based expectations
- **Gender Identity** – way in which an individual identifies with a gender category; may be woman, man, neither, or more complex
- **Gender Neutral**: Not gendered. Can refer to language (including pronouns and salutations/titles—see *gender-neutral salutations or titles*), spaces (like bathrooms), or identities (being genderqueer, for example).
- **Gender nonconforming** – person who doesn’t conform to society’s expectations of gender expression based on gender binary; may or may not also identify as “transgender.”
- **Genderqueer (gender variant, gender bender, gender neutral)**– describes someone who disrupts gender norms, identifies outside of the traditional gender binary, or identifies as some combination of genders; identification often includes a political agenda to challenge stereotypes and binary system
- **Gender Role** – expectations about a particular gender, as influenced by one’s parents, peers, culture, and society.
- **Gender Socialization**: The process by which an individual is taught and influenced (by parents, teachers, peers, media, etc.) on how they should behave as a man or a woman.
- **Gender Spectrum** – a continuum ranging from the extremely masculine to extremely feminine, and including all the infinite number of gendered states in between.
- **Gender Variant**: A term, often used by the medical community, to describe individuals who dress, behave, or express themselves in a way that does not conform to dominant gender norms. (See gender expansive.) People outside the medical community tend to avoid this term because they feel it suggests these identities are abnormal, preferring terms such as *gender expansive* and *gender creative*.
- **Gray-asexual/grayromantic** – the spectrum between asexuality and sexuality or aromantic and romantic. May experience sexual/romantic attraction but not very often or may not desire sexual/romantic relationships.
- **Heteronormative** – assumption and institutionalization of heterosexuality into all

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aspects of society; includes idealization and expectation of heterosexual orientation, romance, and marriage. Can cause queer people to deny or fail to recognize same-sex attraction.

- **Heterosexual/heteroromantic** – someone who is sexually and/or romantically /emotionally attracted to the 'opposite' sex
- **Heterosexism** – the assumption that everyone is and/or should be heterosexual; can be individual or institutional
- **Homophobia** – the irrational fear, hatred, or aversion of homosexual people or feelings; manifests as harassment, discrimination, violence
- **Homosexual/homoromantic** – homosexual is a dated term that may not be used as much to indicate sexual attraction to the same gender, but homoromantic is used to indicate attraction to the same gender.
- **Hormone Therapy** – medical providers prescribe gender affirming hormones (estrogen/anti-androgens, testosterone/androgens) to one's secondary sexual characteristics in line with one's gender identity
- **Internalized Oppression** – negative understanding/assumptions one may carry about oneself, often unaware, due to cultural messages
- **Intersex** – term used for people who are born with a reproductive, chromosomal, or hormonal pattern that does not fit typical definitions of male or female. Conditions of this type are also known as differences or disorders of sex development (DSD), a term that some reject.
- **Lesbian** – female individual who is sexually, romantically and emotionally attracted to women
- **LGBTQIA+** – stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual. The "plus" represents other identities, as the acronym doesn't include everyone.
- **Misgender:** To refer to someone, especially a transgender or gender-expansive person, using a word, pronoun, or form of address, which does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify. [*PFLAG National*]
- **MTX/M2X:** A genderqueer or gender expansive person who was assigned male at birth.
- **Neutrois** – non-binary gender identity which is often associated with a "neutral" or "null" gender. Often, Neutrois people prefer their gender expression to be gender neutral or androgynous, though this may vary from person to person.
- **Non-binary** – any gender identity which does not fit within the binary of man and woman; Individuals who identify as nonbinary may understand the identity as falling under the transgender umbrella, and may identify as transgender. Sometimes abbreviated as *NB* or *enby*.
- **Out:** Generally describes people who openly self-identify as LGBTQ+ in their private, public, and/or professional lives. Some people who are transgender prefer to use the term *disclose*.
- **Outing** – involuntary disclosure of one's sexual, romantic, or gender identity, or other status
- **Pansexual/panromantic** – sexual and/or romantic/emotional attraction or desire that is inclusive of all gender identities and sexual expression and recognizes fluidity of identities; [pan comes from the Greek "all"]
- **Passing** – When your gender is correctly identified by strangers based on your expression and their perception of it
- **Poly/Polyamory** – refers to having consensual, honest, non-possessive relationships with multiple partners; can include open relationships, polyfidelity, subrelationships
- **Polysexual/polyromantic** – Attracted to some, but not all, possible gender. Not to be confused with Pan which includes ALL genders. Note: someone who is polysexual/polyromantic is not necessarily Polyamorous.
- **Pronouns:** The pronoun or set of pronouns that a person identifies with and would like to be called when their proper name is not being used.
- **Personal Gender Pronouns:** PGP—sometimes called *proper gender pronoun*—is the pronoun or set of pronouns that an individual personally uses and would like others to use when talking to or about that individual. In English, the singular pronouns that we use most frequently are gendered, so some individuals may prefer that you use gender neutral or gender-inclusive pronouns when talking to or about them.
- **Queer** – umbrella term for anyone who is non-cisgender and/or non-straight, can also be a person's individual sexual orientation or gender identity; "reclaimed," yet sometimes seen as controversial due to being re-appropriated from slang anti-gay speech
- **Questioning:** Describes those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof.
- **Reparative/Conversion Therapy** – tries to 'cure'/convert homosexuality;

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often religiously-based, can be traumatizing; banned by all major professional organizations

- **Romantic identity/attraction** – describes an interest in romantic interaction, which may or may not align with an interest in sexual interaction and is considered separate from sexual attraction
- **Sex assigned at birth** – The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex based on a combination of anatomy, hormones, chromosomes. It is important we don't simply use "sex" because of the vagueness of the definition of sex and its place in transphobia.
- **Sexual identity/attraction** – one's pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to the sex/genders accompanying; also known as "sexual orientation." NOT "sexual preference" as it implies choice where none exists
- **Sexual Orientation** – Our romantic and/or sexual attractions to folks of a specific gender or genders.
- **Skoliosexual/Skoliromantic** - a person who is attracted to transgender, nonbinary/genderqueer people (Not a fetishization).
- **Stealth**: A term used to describe transgender or gender-expansive individuals who do not disclose their transgender or gender-expansive status in their public or private lives (or certain aspects of their public and private lives). The term is increasingly considered offensive by some as it implies an element of deception. The phrase maintaining privacy is often used instead, though some individuals use both terms interchangeably.
- **Third Gender** – a term for a person who does not identify with either man or woman, but identifies with another gender. This gender category is used by societies that recognize three or more genders, both contemporary and historic, and is also a conceptual term meaning different things to different people who use it, as a way to move beyond the gender binary
- **Transgender (or trans)** – An umbrella term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Transgender is a broad term and is good for non-transgender people to use. "Trans" is shorthand for "transgender." (Note: Transgender is correctly used as an adjective, not a noun, thus "transgender people" is appropriate but "transgenders" is disrespectful; "transgendered" is also disrespectful because it takes away the agency of trans people)
- **Transsexual** – Refers to an individual whose gender identity exists primarily in contradiction to the sex assigned at birth. See transman and transwoman
- **Transsexual**: A less frequently used—and sometimes misunderstood—term (considered by some to be outdated or possibly offensive, and others to be uniquely applicable to them) which refers to people who use (or consider using) medical interventions such as hormone therapy or gender-affirming surgeries (GAS), also called *sex reassignment surgery (SRS)* (or a combination of the two) or pursue medical interventions as part of the process of expressing their gender. Some people who identify as transsexual do not identify as transgender and vice versa.
- **Transition** – the continual process [social, legal, and/or medical, National PFLAG] toward living as the gender with which a person identifies. Surgery or HRT are not necessary to transition, and asking about either is an invasion of privacy.
- **Transman**—is a (person who identifies as) male who was assigned female at birth based on anatomy (*FTM*) *but has a male gender identity*
- **Transwoman** is a (person who identifies as) woman who was assigned male at birth based on anatomy (*MTF*) *but has a female gender identity*
- **Transphobia**—the irrational fear, hatred, or aversion to transgender people; manifests as harassment, discrimination, and violence.
- **Two-Spirit**—Native American or indigenous persons who have distinct identities and gender and social roles in community, often revered or admired.

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